

Statement on the “Weapons Offenses and Offenders” Report

November 11, 1995

These statistics are a chilling reminder to all of us—parents, teachers, police officers and elected leaders—that juvenile violence remains the number one crime problem in America.

I am proud of the landmark legislation we have passed to fight the scourge of youth violence, such as the juvenile handgun ban and zero-tolerance for guns in schools. But if we are to win this fight against crime and violence, more parents must begin to teach their children right from wrong.

And to anyone who would undo the steps I have taken to fight crime and violence in America’s streets and on her schoolyards, I say: Look at the facts. Now is not the time to weaken our laws.

NOTE: This statement was embargoed for release by the Office of the Press Secretary until 5:01 p.m. on November 12.

Statement on the Balkan Peace Process

November 12, 1995

Today’s agreement between the Government of Croatia and the leaders of the local Serbian community on the region of Eastern Slavonia is a major step toward the achievement of an overall peace settlement in the Balkans. This agreement provides for the peaceful reintegration of the region under Croatian sovereignty, following a period of transitional administration by the United Nations.

I congratulate the parties for the wisdom they have shown in entering into this agreement and avoiding renewed conflict. I also congratulate Secretary of State Warren Christopher, who played a direct role in assisting the parties to arrive at this agreement, along with Ambassador Richard Holbrooke and the U.S. and UN mediators, Ambassador Peter Galbraith and Thorvald Stoltenberg.

Remarks on Returning Without Approval Temporary Public Debt Limit Increase Legislation and an Exchange With Reporters

November 13, 1995

The President. Good morning. Today I am vetoing H.R. 2586, which the congressional leadership sent to me last night. It would allow the United States to pay its debts for another month but only at a price too high for the American people to pay. Here are the reasons why.

First, the bill actually increases the likelihood of a default on America’s obligations for the first time in our history by taking away from the Secretary of the Treasury the tools he now has to avoid default under extraordinary circumstances.

Second, the bill obligates the Government—Congress and the President—to pass the Republican congressional budget plan with its huge cuts in Medicare and Medicaid, education and technology, the environment, and its tax increases on working families.

Third, the bill implements the Republican congressional proposal to reverse a 30-year bipartisan commitment to environmental protection and public health. It would increase pollution and decrease the purity and safety of our air, water, and food.

This legislation is part of an overall backdoor effort by the congressional Republicans to impose their priorities on our Nation. Here is what is really going on.

Last spring, Speaker Gingrich said he and his new Republican congressional majority would force me, the congressional Democrats, and the American people to accept their budget and their contract by bringing about a crisis in the fall, by shutting down the Government and pushing America into default, unless I accepted their extreme proposals. In this way, the congressional Republicans sought to get around the United States Constitution which gives the President the power to veto measures not in the public interest.

They are now implementing the strategy Speaker Gingrich told us about last spring. And because I refuse to go along with it, they say I am refusing with them to solve these short-term problems.

When the time came for the Republicans to announce their balanced budget plan, I said I supported a balanced budget. I said I agreed with balancing the budget, but I did not agree with the way they proposed to do it. So I offered an alternative plan, and I offered then to work with them. I offered it repeatedly, beginning 5 months ago. They dismissed my offer and said at every turn that I would simply have to accept their budget conditions. That is what this legislation says again today.

When the time came for them to pass their own budget, however, they did not do their work. It is now 6 full weeks into the new budget year, and they have passed only 3 of the required 13 budget bills. Furthermore, they have not yet resolved the differences between the Republican House and Senate versions of the balanced budget. Instead, they propose to attach elements of a budget plan and their contract to essential bills to raise the debt ceiling so that America can meet its obligations and to keep the Government running until they do finish their budget work and a proper budget is passed. Their goal is to force me to sign legislation which I know to be harmful to our Nation and to its future or to veto the legislation, also with harmful consequences.

This is a critical moment of decision for our country. But the issue is not whether we will balance the budget and not whether I will work with them to solve this short-term problem. I do want to balance the budget. Remember that in 1993 when I took office, we had a huge deficit that was growing larger. Congress passed my economic plan, and since then we have reduced our deficit 3 years in a row for the first time in nearly 50 years. Today, only one industrialized nation has a lower deficit than the United States. We've also reduced the size of the Federal Government dramatically, so that today, as a percentage of the civilian work force, our Federal Government is the smallest it has been since 1933. The American economy has done well since 1993, since this budget plan was passed, as everyone knows.

The balanced budget plan that I have proposed would finish the job. It would eliminate the deficit in a way that strengthens our economy and, most important, reinforces our

most important values: our responsibility to our parents and to our children; to provide opportunity to all Americans to make the most of their own lives through education and technology; to strengthen our families; to preserve our environment; to keep America the world's strongest force for freedom and democracy, for peace and prosperity.

So that is the issue here. I believe we must pass a budget that is consistent with our values and our interests. I have said for months that I will not sign a budget that violates these values and undermines our economic interests.

This bill I veto today is a big downpayment on that Republican congressional budget. It is not good for America.

Our country has to choose between two very different options, two very different visions and paths to the 21st century. Throughout our history, our Nation has been able to reach important decisions on matters like this about national priorities through proper channels of deliberation and debate as set out in our Constitution. This year, the Republican Congress has failed to pass most of its spending bills, has not yet passed its overall budget plan, but instead has sought to impose some of its most objectionable proposals on the American people by attaching them to bills to raise the debt limit and to keep the Government running.

Now, the appropriate step for Congress to take would be to authorize America to meet its obligations and to pass temporary legislation to keep the Government running while this overall budget battle is taking place. This has been the course of action taken at other moments in history when Congress failed to meet its budget deadlines. That is exactly what we did just last September when the Congress did pass and I signed legislation to keep the Government running.

Our agreement in September was fair. It was unbiased. It kept the Government going, able to pay its bills and meet its obligations. That agreement was an honorable compromise. In recent days, Congress has chosen the path of confrontation. It is not in the national interest, but it is exactly what they said they would do last April.

They have attached these controversial long-range proposals to emergency legisla-

tion, not only to meet our financial obligations but just to keep the Government running. In the bill to keep the Government running, they voted to raise Medicare premiums by 25 percent for every single senior citizen who uses Medicare, \$264 a year for the typical couple, beginning the first of January. They voted to roll back three decades of environmental laws. Now they voted to put the United States on the path to default.

This is an unacceptable choice. Congress has said it will pass emergency legislation to keep the Government going and paying its bills only if we increase Medicare, cut education, cut the environment, take other unacceptable steps.

I know the American people want us to balance the budget with common sense and without bitterness, to drop the extreme proposals and get to work. Congress should take the sensible step of passing the legislation necessary to keep the Government going and to have America meet its financial obligations. Therefore, today, I am transmitting legislation to Congress that would enable the Government to pay its bills without forcing the acceptance of extreme cuts in Medicare, education, and the environment. This legislation would enable us to have a fair debate on our country's direction without rancor or threats. Congress should pass it without delay. This is not the time or the place for them to backdoor their budget proposals. It is not the right thing to do. I cannot, and I will not accept it.

Government Shutdown

Q. What happens now? Is the Government going to shut down? Will we default on our bills?

The President. That's up to the Congress. That is entirely up to them. I am certainly willing to work with the bipartisan leadership of the Congress to resolve this problem, but it is important that the American people have a forthright debate over this budget in the ordinary constitutional way. That is important. It is critically important that the President not permit this budget to be passed in a backdoor way, because we have to keep the Government running, because we have to meet our financial obligations.

This budget is a dramatic, even a radical, departure from the deliberate, disciplined, and I might add, highly successful plan that this administration has pursued over the last 2 years. It is also an dramatic and unacceptable departure from the appropriate way of doing business in this Government. America does not react well to this kind of pressure.

Seven Year Budget Agreement

Q. Mr. President, Speaker Gingrich yesterday appeared to offer what may be an olive branch when he said that everything was on the table if you would just agree to sit down and talk and agree in principle to a balanced budget in 7 years. Is that possible? Could you do that? And why not?

The President. I cannot agree in principle—we had a discussion in here the other day, I did with the Speaker and Senator Dole, I would remind you, about the budget and other things. We can have any discussion we want on the budget. But I will not agree as a matter of principle to any discussion in which they say, we want to raise Medicare premiums by 25 percent in a bill designed to keep the Government running or that we want to do it in a bill designed to enable America to meet its financial obligations.

I have asked them to do only one thing. I have asked them to say forthrightly that they're willing to meet with me and the bipartisan congressional leadership in an atmosphere in which they can pass whatever bills they want to pass in the budget process, but they will not attempt to raise Medicare premiums just as the price of letting the Government run for 2 more weeks or another month. I don't think that is right. I don't think the American people think that is right.

There is a procedure for passing budgets and for passing the budget plan. That is a procedure they have chosen not to follow. I don't know how many years, how many decades it's been since the Congress got 6 years into a new budget plan, having voted on only 3 of the 13 budget bills for the year. They have still not even met and resolved the differences between the House and Senate balanced budget plans.

There is a procedure for dealing with this. Now they have to resolve those differences. And it is time to get on the timetable. But

avoiding that, they seek to tack on to measures necessary to simply go through the ordinary business of the Government their budget, including a dramatic increase in Medicare premiums. All I have asked them to do is to say that they will not seek to increase Medicare premiums on this interim legislation to keep the Government running and that we will have this bipartisan meeting of the congressional leadership. And we will talk about everything if they do that. That is all I have asked them to do.

But America has never liked—ordinary Americans don't like pressure tactics. And I would be wrong to permit these kind of pressure tactics to dramatically change the course of American life. I cannot do it, and I will not do it.

Riyadh Terrorist Bombing

Q. Mr. President, what do you know about Riyadh?

The President. At this moment, I know very little more than you do. I know that Americans were killed in an explosion. We have expressed our condolences and deep regret to the families of those who were killed, and we have already begun the process of determining what happened and who, if anyone, was responsible if it was not an accident. And we will devote an enormous effort to that.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:26 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Message to the House of Representatives Returning Without Approval Temporary Public Debt Limit Increase Legislation

November 13, 1995

To the House of Representatives:

I am returning herewith without my approval H.R. 2586, a bill that would provide a temporary increase in the public debt limit while adding extraneous measures that have no place on legislation of this kind.

This bill would make it almost inevitable that the Government would default for the first time in our history. This is deeply irre-

sponsible. A default has never happened before, and it should not happen now.

I have repeatedly urged the Congress to pass promptly legislation raising the debt limit for a reasonable period of time to protect the Nation's creditworthiness and avoid default. Republicans in the Congress have acknowledged the need to raise the debt limit; the budget resolution calls for raising it to \$5.5 trillion, and the House and Senate voted to raise it to that level in passing their reconciliation bills.

This bill, however, would threaten the Nation with default after December 12—the day on which the debt limit increase in the bill would expire—for two reasons:

First, under this bill, on December 13 the debt limit would fall to \$4.8 trillion, an amount \$100 billion below the current level of \$4.9 trillion. The next day, more than \$44 billion in Government securities mature, and the Federal Government would be unable to borrow the funds to redeem them. The owners of those securities would not be paid on time.

Second, the bill would severely limit the cash management options that the Treasury may be able to use to avert a default. Specifically, it would limit the Secretary's flexibility to manage the investments of certain Government funds—flexibility that the Congress first gave to President Reagan. Finally, while the bill purports to protect benefit recipients, it would make it very likely that after December 12, the Federal Government would be unable to make full or timely payments for a wide variety of Government obligations, including interest on the public debt, Medicare, Medicaid, military pay, certain veterans' benefits, and payments to Government contractors.

As I have said clearly and repeatedly, the Congress should keep the debt limit separate from the debate over how to balance the budget. The debt limit has nothing to do with reducing the deficit; it has to do with meeting the obligations that the Government has already incurred.

Nevertheless, Republicans in the Congress have resorted to extraordinary tactics to try to force their extreme budget and priorities into law. In essence, they have said they will not pass legislation to let the Government